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EDWARD J.
O'LEARY

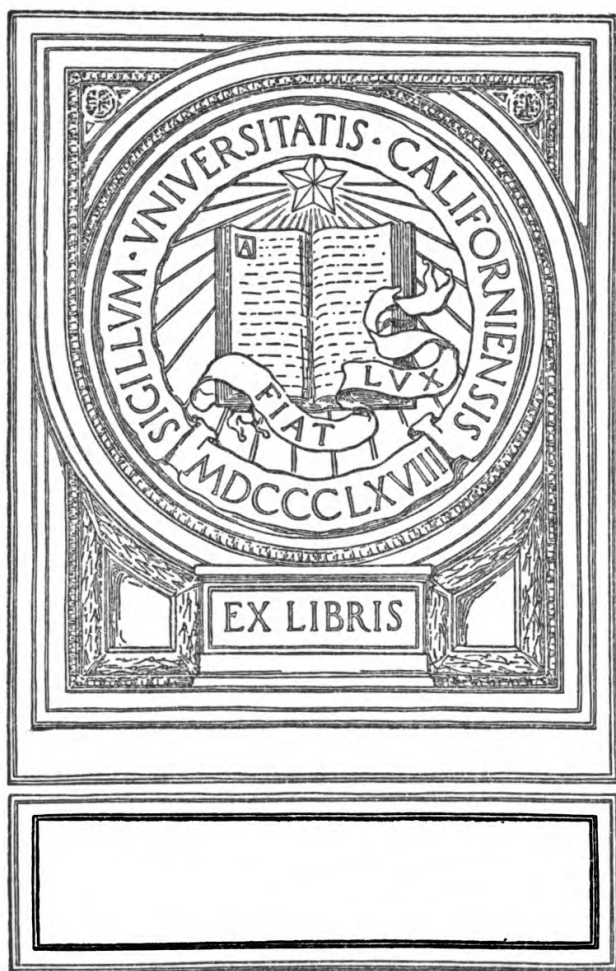


Illustrations by

Corporal LEONARD SANSONE

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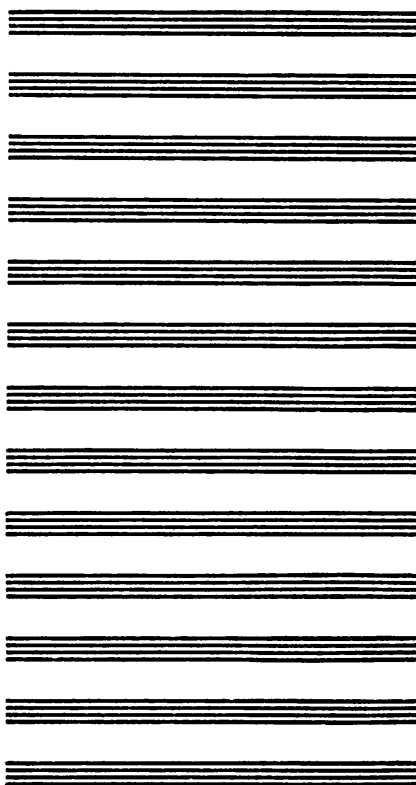
Semi-Private



On either side of the corridor was a soldier armed with a hypodermic needle.



SERGEANT
EDWARD J.
O'LEARY



Semi-Private

Or HOW TO BE A SOLDIER
IN TEN EASY LESIONS

Illustrations by Corporal LEONARD SANSONE

G • P • PUTNAM'S SONS • NEW YORK

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Edward J. O'Leary and Leonard Sansone

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**Dedicated to my mother who
is responsible for all this.**

INTRODUCTION

There are two periods in a soldier's experience when he needs a high morale to carry him through. The most important is, of course, during the hour of combat. The second is that period in Training Centers immediately following his break with civilian pursuits, home ties, and unregimented living. It is during this latter phase when Camp newspapers and magazines can and do help the trainee's morale.

Sergeant Edward J. O'Leary has been editor of the Fort Belvoir Training Center publication, *The Duckboard*, since May of 1941. During that time he wrote *Semi-Private*. The material appeared in *The Duckboard* and was a definite contribution to the high morale we have here at Fort Belvoir.

I believe that the civilian readers of *Semi-Private* will enjoy it fully as much as the fifty thousand or more trainees who have had an opportunity to laugh at and sometimes experience the trials and tribulations of the bemuddled hypothetical but authentic American trainee-soldier.

If what I believe is correct this book will enjoy the success it deserves. With it Sergeant O'Leary is contributing a worth-while morale builder by finding humor in the serious job of soldiering.

JOSEPH W. MCNEAL
Major, Corps of Engineers
Special Service Officer
E. R. T. C., Fort Belvoir, Va.

CHAPTER ONE

I'm Informed

IT WAS THROUGH NO FAULT OF MINE THAT IT HAPPENED to me. My "friends and neighbors" hatched the plot. I had been reading in the papers that the Army would be made up of model young men, not horrible examples, and that, of course, automatically let me out. With all the overeating I had done I was nothing less than a mess of morsels.

One suspiciously fine day, however, I went to the front door to pick up whatever mail might have blown over from the neighbor's house, and something happened that was to change my way of living. I scraped a long and white envelope from the floor of the porch, opened it rather casually, and read: "Greetings! You have been chosen by your neighbors..." It took me only a brief second to realize that I was one of the many being called, but I hastily consoled myself that I would be one of the few not chosen. In the first place, I wasn't even a reasonable facsimile of Army material, and in the second place I'd be out of place any place in the Army. I had no illusions about myself. I knew that I was physically pffft, but I was contented.

I crawled back to my armchair and fell down to do some thinking. I could see that it hadn't done me any good to claim as dependents a pool room, two beer joints, and an Indian Medicine Man. Nor had my listing my occupation as "Housewife" helped me to any degree at all. Obviously, the Draft Board wasn't interested in who I chased in my spare time. I began to feel resigned to my fate.

After a few more minutes I decided it would be best to go upstairs and take a look at myself in the flesh, something I hadn't dared do in recent years. Shortly I was standing in front of a full-length mirror that kept casting nasty reflections at me. But no matter where I stood it looked as though I had been piled there. I was constructed along the general lines of a tallow candle with a tendency to drip down over the sides. Two hundred spongy pounds and not an ounce of muscle!

I stood there remembering the fateful day I had registered with my Draft Board. The young lady questioning me had become embarrassingly personal. I hadn't been seated in front of her for more than a few seconds when she looked coyly up at me and asked, "Sex?" Of course a Draft Board office is no place for that sort of thing, and I was nervous anyway, so I said no. But that didn't stop her. She just looked at me oddly and asked, "Race?" Not being at all athletic I had to refuse and she soon lost interest in me, letting me go after asking a few more silly questions that any fool could have answered as easily as I did.

Then, when I got home that afternoon, I showed my mother the notice I had received, and I said to her, "There must be some mistake. The Army says it needs men."

She just smiled at me and stroked my hair for a moment. "That's why they want you, dear," she said. "To prove it."

We sat quietly for a few moments after that, and then she said more sympathetically than before, "It might not be so bad. It will probably make a man out



The mirror cast nasty reflections at me.

of you." She looked me over carefully and added: "In fact, it will probably make two men out of you."

Later on in the day I dropped the news, together with a few bucks over a pair of loaded dice, to the boys in front of the drugstore on the corner. They all crowded around me, and one of them turned to his companion. "See," he said triumphantly. "That proves it. I tol' yuh the United States would try a war of nerves first."

Another of the bunch, more friendly than the rest, patted my shoulder and said, "Don't lose your head, Ed."

"Why not?" demanded one of the other fellows. "It's only a shell, anyway. I think it would be a decided improvement."

I flounced away angrily, saying over my shoulder, "I'll decide that." I wasn't going to take any of his lip, although from the looks of his face he could spare it.

A few days later I saw them again on the morning I was leaving to be examined. Some of them shook my hand; the rest of them shook their heads. But I bid them all good-by, telling them that it was every man's duty to do his best for his country. This impressed them, for they promised me that if I were inducted they'd send me a carton of fair-sized cigarette butts once a month. I had given up smoking some time before this. It was getting too difficult for me to stoop over, and I hadn't had much luck with a Chesapeake Bay Retriever. He kept bringing me back small pieces of Delaware.

As I climbed onto the bus I heard one of my friends say proudly, "There goes the best soldier the enemy will have."

CHAPTER TWO

T I'm Inspected

THE EXAMINING BOARD HAD ITS OFFICE IN A building that looked like a rusty old cracker box. Earlier in the day I learned that, previous to its conversion into an Induction Center, it had been a morgue. Before the day was over I nearly put it back in business again.

To make a good impression and to help convince the doctors that Industry was desperately in need of me, I wore a new blue suit on that eventful day. The clerk who sold it to me swore by the beard of the profit that it was a true English model and that it had been introduced at the famous race track, Epsom Downs. And it was probably ignored there, too. At first I hadn't believed him, but on the way to be examined two horses tried to crawl under it with me. One thing he did tell me was true. It was a genuine herringbone weave. The first time I wore it eleven cats followed me all the way home.

Inside the doorway of the examining board's building I walked over to a highly polished desk behind which sat an old sergeant with a highly polished nose. He paid no attention to me, and I stood there in a small group by myself, wondering what to do next. Finally he looked up.

"I believe I'm to be inducted," I said.

His eyes made a round trip over my body. He shook his head and said, "I don't. But you can try like hell." Then he dismissed me, pointing to a door at the end of the room. I made a bee-line for it, little realizing I was going to get stung.

Beyond the door I found a very big room overflowing with naked men. There was so much exposed flesh it looked like the window of a Chinese market. At first I thought I was in Minsky's, but it didn't take long to find out differently.

One fellow was wedged against the wall, moaning loudly. I asked him what was wrong.

"I've been rejected for three days," he wailed. "But it's so crowded in here I can't bend down to get my pants on." Twenty minutes later he enlisted so he could get outside for a breath of fresh air.

Presently I stood there as naked as the others. A lieutenant of the Medical Corps walked over to me. He told me to line up with the rest, and I stood with five fellows, all of them in the same boat as myself. One of them had such big ears he looked as if he'd brought paddles for it. A fat, round, pot-bellied colored boy stood beside me. He looked like a stove in a railroad station. Once I saw someone put a match to him to see if they could light a fire. Farther down the line was a young college student with such crossed eyes he had a "Detour" sign on the bridge of his nose.

The Medical Corps lieutenant came back and walked down the line we formed, placing a stethoscope on our chests. He stabbed too hard when he came to me, and it took him ten minutes to unscrew his arm.

"Is my heart beating?" I asked him anxiously.

"You bet it is," he replied. "In fact, it sounds as if it was trying to fight its way out."

After he was through examining us we had a few minutes to relapse. Another of the fellows who was



One fellow was wedged against the wall, moaning loudly.

with me turned to me and said, "This is no place for me. I want to fly."

"I feel the same way," I said. "But I don't see any way to get out."

"Oh, I don't mean that," he said, and he explained to me that he wanted to get into the Air Corps. I paid little attention to him, but when he turned his back I saw that he was serious. He had ailerons on his shoulder blades.

In another room we were given an eye test. The only thing proved, so far as I could see, was the fact that we had the usual two. I sat down on a camp stool, hanging over the sides like a saddle, and then I tried to read the symbols on the chart on the wall. The words read as if they were in Sanskrit, and I couldn't make sense out of them. One of the doctors whispered that they were an Army Regulation, and I had no reason to doubt him.

Further down the hall I was X-rayed. That was one thing that really bothered me. My so-called friends had warned me that since photography had progressed in the last thirty years they were now taking X-rays in technicolor. This, I figured, is where photography is pushed back at least two decades.

An attendant plastered me up against a piece of cold black metal, then he walked away and forgot me. I thought, as I stood there, if they really take these X-rays in technicolor I'm in a hell of a fix. They're certain to show the yellow streak up my back. The whole trouble with X-ray machines is that they take pictures of what even your best friend can't tell you.

Pretty soon my flesh began crawling toward the floor to huddle around my ankles. I began to feel like a man



"Is my heart beating?" I asked him anxiously.

falling down a flight of stairs. Just as I was about to collapse, the attendant returned and busied himself taking several exposures of my lungs. He said he felt like a commercial photographer taking shots of bellows. After they were completed he showed them to me. They were as spotted as a leopard with the chicken-pox.

Sometime during the rest of the afternoon I found out that the attendant was an amateur photographer, and a few weeks after he took X-rays of my lungs he entered a few prints of them in a photographic contest by mistake. They won first prize for having the most freckled face in Pocahontas County.

CHAPTER THREE

A I'm Inducted

AFTER A HASTY LUNCH OF POTATO SALAD THAT tasted like wet chalk, fish with so many bones I thought I was eating a comb, and rice a Japanese bride must have bungled, I returned to the one-time morgue to have my examination completed. When I got there I removed my blue droop suit, hanging it carefully over the back of a chair.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you, bud," a lieutenant said. "When you left your suit there this morning we mistook it for an awning. If we hadn't seen the sleeves in it, it would be hanging up outside right now."

Herded back into our corral we were made to strip once again. This time the doctors got right down to business, their sole interest being our feet. Mine were so flat it would take a carpenter's level to find any flaws in them, but the doctor must have had astigmatism. He saw curves where there wasn't a one, and I suspected him of thinking of his girl friend. He certified that my feet were all right.

"You'll go a long way with those feet," he said.

And I have!

Then my teeth got some attention. One of the fellows was afraid his wouldn't pass because they were as false as my hopes. Mine were so filled with rank rice they looked perfect.

Last of all came a blood test, and that amounted to the final blow. The young attendant taking a specimen of my blood was very nervous, and after he got through I discovered he had braided my veins. For quite a while

afterward every time I got a cut I had to bandage myself in three places.

At last the tests were over, and we could relax for a few minutes. I put my clothes back on again and stretched out on a bench. Oddly enough, I began thinking about the Army. I knew I was as good as out of it. All the publicity I had read said the Army built men. It hadn't said a word about resurrecting them.

Getting up I talked with several of the fellows who had been examined with me. One said, "Well, there's a lot of good jobs in the Army. They try to give you the type of thing you were doing on the outside."

I perked up at that. "Do you think they've got a job as a civilian for me?" I asked. "That's all I ever did before this."

Soon an old sergeant came over to us. He had such an armful of service stripes he looked as if he had been raked. "Stand up," he ordered.

We did.

"You've all been accepted into the Army," he growled. I didn't believe it, and he must have noticed it from the expression on my face.

"Yes, you, too, Fatty," he said.

Surely, I thought, he doesn't mean me. But he did.

"We need guys like you just to show what the Army can do," he added. "Stand over there and raise your right hand, too."

I did.

He administered the oath to us, and it was a little different from the one I had in mind. After he was through he looked over at me again.



"We need fellows like you just to show what we can really do!"

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded. "Don't you like the idea?"

"Sure, I do," I said, realizing I was now a soldier.

"Suppose this country goes to war?" he said. "Don't you want to back it up?"

"You bet I do," I answered quickly. "In fact, I'd like to back it up right now—to 1936. Things were a helluva lot better for me then."

CHAPTER FOUR

I'm In

ON THE TRAIN TO THE RECEPTION CENTER I SAT with a bartender and a newspaperman. The bartender was a huge, strapping fellow with so many muscles he had to drink liniment in order to massage all of them. But with all his strength he was always trying to find some way to get out of work. He admitted he had more angles than a modernistic dancer. The newspaperman talked unceasingly about the big things he would write some day, but even the card he sent home was abbreviated.

Early in the evening we arrived at our destination. My legs were as weak as wet spaghetti, and just about as dependable. The bartender, with his shoulders thrown back and his chest puffed out, stood there looking like an ice cream cone. The newspaperman was as out of place as an error in a headline. We peered around us for the Army truck in which we were supposed to be taken to the Fort. Finally we spotted one. In it was a sergeant who, seeing us at the same time we saw him, beckoned to us with a flashlight. I urged my two companions to move quickly, but the bartender took over and set the pace. He moved as fast as an ambulance driver out for a walk. I warned him that the sergeant might get mad and sock him with the flashlight.

"Let him," he answered arrogantly. "I'll have him pinched for assault with a battery." Then he added: "Sergeants aren't any good anyway. They shoulda been born with laryngitis."

"You ought to be more careful," I told him nervously. "After all, the guy's got three stripes on his arm."

"He'll have a hundred across his back if he starts anything with me."

The sergeant asked us if we were the new selectees. We told him we were, and he smiled down on us, if you can call it that. To me it looked as if he were just flexing his lips. He told us to get in the back of the truck. We rode there until we got to the Fort, and I thought I was in the Spanish Inquisition on wheels. Afterward, I knew what a scrambled egg goes through.

In less than half an hour we were in our new home. We dropped our bags and other belongings and marched to the Mess Hall, where I had my first Army meal, and that was hash! Army hash is different than that in any other place in the world. The way I felt it looked as if it had a sort of a lethal beige color, and that's not a good beginning. If you've had hash at home you suspected that your mother cleaned up the kitchen when she made it. In the Army I was sure they went out and swept up the parade ground. But the way I felt *crêpes Suzette* at the Ritz would have tasted like burnt shoe soles on a picnic.

We had coffee, too. That's a blackout in a cup. I took several big mouthfuls of it, and two days later I managed to swallow it. For dessert we were given bread pudding, but I had trouble eating mine. Someone stole the little hammer that went with it. After I was through eating and stood up there wasn't any doubt that I'd had a square meal. My stomach had two corners on it and I felt like a geometry problem.

Back in the barracks we were given clean sheets, a



The Sergeant asked us if we were the new selectees.

pillow case, two blankets and a comforter. It looked as if we were expected to stay for a long time. Then we were initiated into making our beds. When I got through with mine it looked like a pile of old clothes thrown under a stove for some dog to sleep on. Some Harvard student, taking pity on me, came over and offered to give me a little help. And he meant it. He gave me very little help, but I was fascinated when I watched him talk. He spoke with such a broad "A" his lips bounced off his ear lobes.

At nine o'clock a bugle blew Lights Out, and I tried to sleep, but I couldn't. I rolled over once and bumped my head on the under-side of the bed next to me. It was just like sleeping on a bathroom shelf. We sleep head to foot because, it says on the bulletin board in the barracks, it's sanitary. As for me, I think the idea smells.

There were twenty-eight other selective service men in the barracks with me. One of them had just arrived in America from Russia, and on the way he had passed through Warsaw while it was being bombed. He had nightmares while he slept, and he would dream of the incendiary bombs that had been dropped on the Polish capital. Twice the first night I ran for an extinguisher to help him put out the fires.

He had another annoying habit. He would talk in Russian while he slept. By morning I had heard two of Tolstoy's books in the original tongue, and the things I could tell you about the Volga River I wouldn't dare repeat.

CHAPTER FIVE

A I'm in Transit

AT 5:20 THE NEXT MORNING WE WERE AWAKENED by a corporal shining a light in our faces. I thought it was the night before the Fourth, or at least the sun coming up, but it was just reveille. After standing a few minutes trying to remember where I was, I realized I hadn't fallen asleep in a subway, but that I was in the Army.

The corporal told us to fall out, and most of us did. We stood in the sharp, cold air and answered to our names screamed at us out of the dark. Then we stumbled off to breakfast like a hundred of Snow White's Little Dwarfs. I, of course, was Dopey. Those more familiar with breakfast sang a pretty little marching tune. It went like this: "Ho, hum, Ho hum, We're off to get some slum."

Generally speaking it was a fine meal, with the exception of the scrambled eggs. The cook must have been an old-time confidence man still playing the old shell game. The eggs he cooked included the cases they came in, and I thought I was eating strawberry boxes.

Following this we had an intelligence test. Some of the fellows wrote the answers to the questions as if they were taking a dare. The test was given us to determine if or how much, so far as intelligence was concerned. The answers to most of them are still military secrets.

Later the Articles of War were explained to us. The first time I'd heard of them I thought they were weapons, but they turned out to be regulations. From



*Then we stumbled off to breakfast like a hundred of Snow
White's Little Dwarfs.*

them I gathered that the soldier can't commit murder, rape, go A.W.O.L., or think.

At the same time we were instructed in military courtesy. It seems the soldier isn't entitled to any. Up to this point I had thought it necessary to bow to a non-commissioned officer, salute a lieutenant, kneel to a captain and kiss the feet of anyone above the rank of major. Since then I have found it much simpler. I just duck!

Our clothing was issued to us on this same day, too. The uniform they gave me must have been a reject from a jute mill. It looked as if it had been made to be sold as a sag suit. My pants were so large I had to take three steps before they'd move, and sometimes they were so reluctant they tried to trip me. And my shirts draped about me in folds. They drooped sort of sloppily over my bulk like a sheet over a statue waiting to be unveiled. From the rear I was frequently mistaken for a theater curtain. Once, when I was standing on a street corner near a bus stop, three small children stood behind me for twenty minutes waiting for the Punch and Judy show to start. After I was given all of my wrappings and got to the end of the line the supply sergeant sent me back.

"We aren't supposed to issue tents today," he said.

Outside once again our sergeant yelled, "Atten-hut." He meant attention, and in the Army that's rigor mortis in khaki.

He looked down at me. "What's the matter with you?" he shouted. "Didn't you hear me? I yelled atten-hut."

"Yes," I answered with great dignity. "I heard you, but my uniform didn't. It's so old it's stone deaf, and if it



Three small children stood behind me waiting for the Punch and Judy show to start.

had heard you it wouldn't have known what you said. It understands only English."

That was my first experience with extra duty.

We went back to the theater again where the air was still filled with the dense smell of old intelligence tests. This time we were to see some motion pictures dealing with the effects of venereal diseases. After viewing the pictures I could see that there were some advantages to being a hermit. Two other soldiers fainted, and one rushed off to the Recruiting Office to volunteer for foreign service in Tibet. At first I thought of getting at the phone book and selecting a nice, quiet monastery, but then, in keeping with a modern Army, I decided I would feel like a mechanized eunuch—equipped, but disinterested.

Apparently the Army accepts the fact that sex is here to stay, but at a safe distance from the soldier.

CHAPTER SIX

A I'm in the Making

AT NIGHT WE LEFT ON AN EIGHTEEN-HOUR TRAIN ride to travel a distance of four hundred miles. One short cut took us through Canada.

The Army provided us with Pullman cars in which to make our uneventful journey, and I drew an upper berth. Before the night was over an Italian, a Greek, two Dutchmen and a Jewish soldier tried to get in with me by mistake, I guess. I thought I was in the "Berth of a Nation."

In my upper berth I felt like one of last year's hats thrown on the back of a shelf. Once during the night I rolled over and spread across the aisle like an awning. It was more comfortable in that position, so I pretended I was a ceiling decoration, and I finished the trip that way.

Four hundred miles south as the crow flies (and I wish they'd had one to plot the route) we pulled into a red brick warehouse on the edge of a cliff. On one side was space; on the other was space filled with a brass band and a dozen lieutenants. We got off the train and I stood there looking like something refused at a rummage sale. Our knees were so stiff from riding that they squeaked, and some of us suspected one of the soldiers of having brought his bagpipes.

Our new officers and instructors greeted us with cheerful expressions and harsh words. "This is the Army. You'll be expected to work," were the harshest words I'd ever heard.

One of the corporals came from Alabama, and he



*When I came out I looked like a shaving brush with
the mange.*

spoke to us with a Southern accent. That's a mouthful of vowels—unpunctuated. His vocal chords were made of molasses and when he got nervous and stuttered they had a taffy pull.

In no time at all we were settled in our newest home, and all the rest of the fellows were ready to go to work. As for me, I was willing to arbitrate, but I had no one to arbitrate with, so it was no use. When our corporal came up the stairs and told us to get into fatigue clothes and fall out, I did as the rest of them. Only when I saw myself in fatigues I was ready to fall down. Fatigue clothes are a jumper and a pair of pants the Army issues men to get tired in.

And I did.

After lunch we all had to have a G. I. haircut. This is compulsory, so there must be some practical advantage to it other than classifying the company we keep. I know from my own experience that the barber manages to shave our heads and our egos at the same time. G. I., incidentally, means General Issue, and that is not, as I thought, a Japanese officer.

These G. I. haircuts are, in reality, a simplified method of reducing a man's dignity. The barber just puts the clippers close to your ears and then cuts straight up until he hits fresh air. When I came out I looked like a shaving brush with the mange.

We weren't through with our haircuts before the Army doctors started inoculating us, it seemed. Again we were lined up and marched slowly down a long corridor with a soldier on either side, each of them armed with a long needle. As we walked slowly by we got a hypodermic Mickey Finn, and I felt like an un-

welcome tourist in a beehive. After I'd been in the Army a brief time I'd had so many needles jabbed into me that I woke up one morning and tried to lace my arm. I thought it was a legging.

Before we were through with the needles, we received inoculations for typhoid, tetanus, diphtheria, and eleven other diseases the Army only suspected. After a while I got so mad even the white corpuscles in my blood saw red.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I Learn About Food

IT WASN'T MANY DAYS BEFORE I BEGAN LEARNING THE millions of quaint little customs of the Army. Less than a week after I arrived at the little prep school by the railroad tracks I was put on the K.P. list, starting a trend that I followed closely for the next two months. Before that much time had passed I'd had K.P. seven times. It got so that when I walked into the kitchen the stoves recognized me and tipped their lids to me. One more time as K.P. and I'd have been made Chief of the Kitchen Police.

While doing this I met an interesting character who had been a cook in the Army for more years than he would admit. When very young he had had smallpox, and that, combined with his having stood over a hot stove so many years, gave his face the appearance of a dish of old broccoli. During the day he would tell me stories of the two types of Army cooking with which he had experience: B.D. and A.D., meaning Before the Draft and After the Draft.

Some years before being transferred he'd been stationed near a town that was so small church services were held in a sentry box. Only three soldiers were allowed passes on a weekend. Any more than that would have created a traffic problem. Telling me of the things he was given to eat while he was there soon convinced me that Oscar of the Waldorf had his hand in the cooking of the food where I was. Ordinarily, this would have been all right, but frequently the food tasted as if Oscar forgot to wash his hand.



It is like having lunch at a wrestlers boarding house.

The old cook told me he'd been given food that was so badly prepared even his tapeworm refused to eat it. He insisted, in fact, that in three weeks time his tapeworm went on a hunger strike and starved to death.

Up until then I thought I had a sensitive stomach, and I found Army food just a little too solid for me. But, after listening to my new found friend talk, I could eat anything. Vegetable soup, he told me, was the simplest thing in the world for the cooks to prepare. They just sent a K.P. out to mow down a garden, and when he brought it back in a couple of baskets they boiled and salted and served it as vegetable soup.

In the good old days, he said, it would seem that the meat served in the Army wasn't killed—it was persecuted. And Navy beans were part of the every day diet, too. They were called Navy beans, incidentally, because it took so much water to float them. In taste they were similar to well-cooked burlap, but I found them not quite so binding.

Liver and onions (it says in the paper) are popular with the soldier. To me it's like eating suede with a smell. It's the only positive way that I ever heard of to be lonesome with company. But even that's not as bad as the potatoes the old cook told me he used to have to eat. The cooks would grease them so they'd slide down faster and he wouldn't get a chance to taste them. One day one of the cooks dropped three pieces of rawhide in with some French fried potatoes by mistake, and nobody said a word. But the next time they had them there were plenty of complaints. The cooks left the rawhide out.

For the first few weeks I had trouble eating in the

Mess Hall. I thought of Napoleon (he's the Frenchman who thought Russia was cold Turkey) and his famous remark about an Army marching on its stomach. I learned he was right the hard way, because whenever I walked into the Mess Hall mine retreated. But now I can't get enough food to eat at any time. Sitting at one of the tables is like having lunch at a wrestlers' boarding house. If I don't move my arms fast enough someone will put salt and pepper on them and start chewing. The tables are set to accommodate ten, but eight always left the table still hungry. Sometimes I got such a small quantity of food I had to pick my teeth in order to get a second helping. And the days I did manage to get my clutches on the food before anybody else massacred it, it was usually a bird that the cook wrestled, the winner going into the oven. Ten to one it was all muscle and no meat.

The one thing that I did eat frequently was alphabet soup. Most of the fellows didn't seem to care for it, but I always liked to read. The only real trouble I had with the soup was the fact that I got the same three letters in it all the time, and they spelled W-A-R. That wouldn't have been so bad, but I'm a person easily led and always open to suggestion, so when the soup gave up the letters A-W-O-L one night, I stopped eating it. It was acting too much like a Ouija board.

On Sundays we always have chicken, turkey or some kind of fowl. I thought this quite good, but the old cook changed my mind. The food he had in the Army at every meal, he said, was foul.

CHAPTER EIGHT

O I'm Marching

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS IN THE Army, I learned, is drilling. Interesting little games such as marching backward and then forward, to the right and then to the left, are taught the eager soldier. After a few days playing this I had several dozen small blisters, I ached all over and I knew what was meant by a "raw recruit."

The first day that I drilled I spent seven hours learning to execute "By the right flank, Harch." The second day I spent the same amount of time learning to execute "By the left flank, Harch." The third day I couldn't move either flank and I wanted to execute the lieutenant.

One important thing I did learn, however, was the Army way of shouting commands. It seems that whenever it is possible to use the letter aitch in place of any other in a command, then it is right and proper to do so. I couldn't help thinking that the U. S. Army must send a small group of noncoms with baskets to England to pick up all the aitches dropped over there. It isn't possible to get so many into the Army any other way.

There was one fellow in my squad who couldn't march as well as I could, and he was always out of step. Every time he lost step with the rest of the squad he'd skip to catch up with the other men. After he was there only three weeks he'd skipped so much he had to have new calluses put on his feet. The fourth week he was there he skipped out of camp and when he got back he had to have new calluses put some place else.

Hiking was among the things considered good for us. We do quite a bit of that because (the Captain says)



One fellow couldn't march at all.

it's good for us. After I'd been there a short time the company had its first ten-mile hike; they took me along. When I returned from it and removed my shoes I had so many blisters my feet looked like two pans of biscuits. I was sweating so much my pores decided to make a game of it. They were having a contest to see who could throw the drops of perspiration the farthest.

Some days we start off right by running over a delightful little arrangement of traps and pitfalls called a Cross Country Course. It must have been designed by a person with ulcers, because nobody could do to their stomach what that does to mine unless they hated it. We climb fences, jump ditches, chin ourselves on slippery hunks of iron bars, run up banks of sandbags and over trenches and through pipes. A soldier has to be a cross between a squirrel, a mole, and an auger.

The first time we were to run over this bloated miniature golf course I asked the lieutenant what the record time for completion was, and he told me it had been done in two minutes and thirty seconds flat. Having failed somewhat miserably at so many other things, I decided to try for a new record, and I gave it everything I had, but I must have been hoarding something. How many minutes it took me to make the trip I'm not sure, but I distinctly remember finishing it flat!

Afterward, when we were to repeat the course, I remarked to the lieutenant that I just couldn't see me doing that again, and he said I was having obstacle illusions. I laughed dutifully and went ahead, collapsing halfway around. I looked so natural lying there that now I'm an obstacle, and every time the course is run I just stretch out while the other soldiers avoid me.

CHAPTER NINE

C I'm Making Progress

CONSTRUCTION WORK IS A MAJOR PART OF OUR education. Day after day we would march out to isolated areas in the woods interrupted only by little streams of water running through them. Here we worked like mad building bridges in the morning, and in the afternoon we work and get mad tearing them down. I usually managed to get the job as tool corporal. This requires no effort whatsoever. All I had to do was see that nobody stole tools they had no use for and couldn't get away with if they did take them. It required little education, a minimum of effort, and no ambition. Somehow, the lieutenant considered me ideally suited to the job.

Another phase of our training was the handling and use of dynamite and T.N.T., two things I didn't want to handle and had absolutely no use for at all. The first time we had demolition problems everybody seemed to be having a bang-up time but me. I was so nervous my teeth chattered and two soldiers in front of me got hell for doing the rhumba. The nearer we got to the field in which we were to set off several pounds of dynamite, the more nervous I became. It got so bad my goose pimples were developing feathers.

Our lieutenant, a merry little fellow, talked to us of the advantages of demolitions, tossing a stick of dynamite in the air as he lectured. He apparently heard my teeth chattering, because he looked over at me and said, reassuringly, "Suppose it should go off? It will only hurt you for a second." Naturally, I felt better right away.

A stick of dynamite was forced on me sometime

later, and I was told to place it in the field and blow a hole in the ground. Two other soldiers were sent with me. I was still very nervous, and I said to them, "This dynamite is nothing to play with. Let's drop it."

It took me more than half an hour to find which tree they were hiding behind.

Once we marched out into the woods for instructions in the proper way to dig a "fox hole." These oddly named cavities are no more complicated than a hole in the ground, and strangely enough, that's exactly what they are. Three feet in diameter and five feet deep, they are intended as individual shelters and fortresses for the soldier. After digging mine I had so many blisters my hand felt like a hangover. When I got back to the barracks I drained them and had enough water to boil two eggs. The only soldier to finish his without any trouble was the son of a whirling dervish. He just stood over the spot he had selected and bored his way into the ground.

After the holes are dug a cover of twigs, branches of trees, and leaves is made for them. This fits over the top and the soldier climbs in with his rifle and pack. Then he just sits there and pretends he's a spider until the enemy comes along. When he passes overhead the soldier in the fox hole raises the cover and takes a potshot at him. The way we did we had no bullets, so we just sneered.

Toward the end of our training we were instructed in the use of the bayonet, it being the required subject at this particular academy. I didn't do very well at it, but that's because I haven't got a duel personality.

Our lieutenant explained to us the proper method of



Our lieutenant talked to us of the advantages of demolitions, tossing sticks of dynamite into the air as he lectured.

handling the bayonet and told us the vital spots most easily hit. Pointing to his throat he stressed, "If you ever do have to use this bayonet, be sure and get the jugular first."

The fellow standing beside me scratched his head and asked, "What the hell are we going to fight? A vaudeville act?"

When we practiced we formed two lines and faced one another. At a signal we would rush toward the soldier opposite us and pretend to attack him. I'd have done poorly at this, but my "opponent" was so round-shouldered he did his breathing with one lung at a time, and when he stopped to shift I ran by him and got away.

Slashing, smashing, and jabbing were all major parts of this bayonet drill. It's not unlike a dance at the Service Club. I went once to one of them, and while I was there I tried to meet a girl. When I arrived there were already three thousand soldiers and a few pretty girls. After an hour and a half I managed to dance with one girl's elbow for twenty seconds. I tried to get a date with her, and I gave her my name. But she said she had trouble remembering names, so she took my serial number instead.

Cutting in at these dances is the custom, and trying to get a dance that way is the same as inviting someone to break your arm. I got one dance that way, and I asked the girl a question. Somebody else cut in on us and I had to get some other girl to answer it.

But, to get back to the Army. Learning to shoot a rifle was exciting. I had always wanted to live dangerously, and this was it. My rifle was like a politician. It

kept shooting off at the darndest times. Out on the range one day the lieutenant raised hell with me for pointing my rifle at a soldier. "But it isn't loaded," I told him. "See." And I banged it on the ground. It went off and the bullet headed directly for the target, giving me a bull's-eye and almost my first soldier.

I told the lieutenant I was just dying to qualify, and when he told me he wished I would qualify on that basis, I gave up the idea of learning much about a rifle.

But the lieutenant told me he would like me to have a medal, and he would see if he couldn't find some way to get me one for saving lives if I promised not to shoot my rifle at all.

CHAPTER TEN

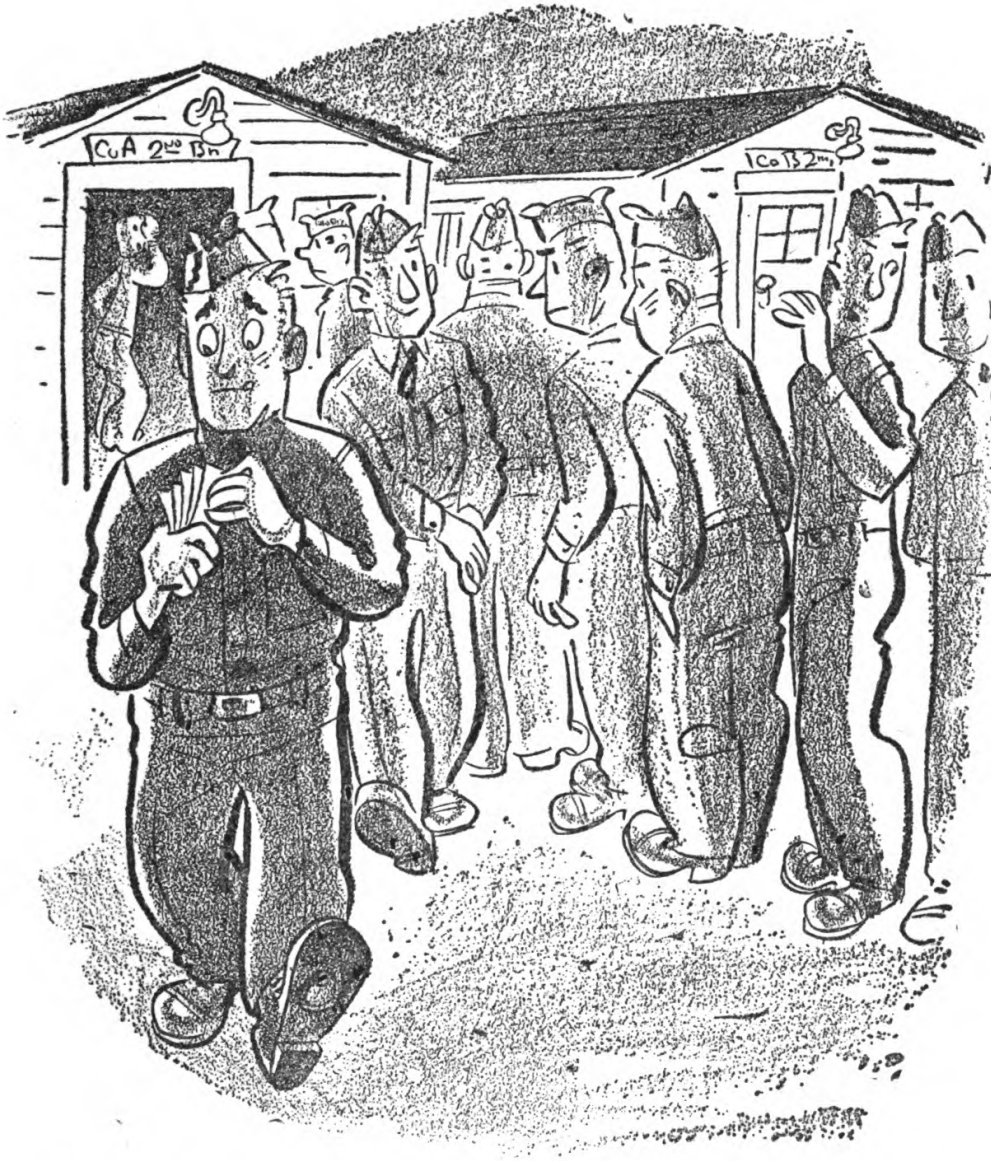
A I'm Almost Trained

FEW PAY DAYS HAD PASSED ME BY BUT, LIKE every dog, I finally had my day. After we had eaten supper one night our money was given to us. We all shaved, took showers, shined our shoes and changed our clothes. We looked just as neat and shining as if we were going in to ask our boss for a raise.

We stood outside the building in which the captain had his office. The sergeant had arranged us in alphabetical disorder, and while we stood there we rehearsed getting our money from the Company Commander. Some of the fellows pretended they weren't really interested in taking such a small sum, but they thought they must so they wouldn't confuse the Treasury Department. Others thought the money was hardly enough and they were worth much more. I just stood there with my tongue hanging out. A couple of fellows thought I was wearing a red necktie.

That night, after getting paid, I went to town for a big blow-out. Beautifully clothed in my newly pressed uniform, I was out to set the town on fire. Before a few hours had passed I was burned up.

Once I was inside the town I got off the bus and strutted down the avenue as proud as a peacock, and with my big overcoat trailing behind me I looked like one. I hadn't gone two hundred yards before an elderly lady came rushing over to me, handed me a slip of yellow paper and fifty cents, and said, "Here, boy. Deliver this telegram for me." I was halfway down the block before I realized what I was doing.



*A few pay days had passed me by but, like every dog,
I finally had my day.*

Then I went into a little restaurant on a side street and asked the waitress to bring me a double order of scrambled eggs, a dish we had almost every morning in the Army. When she brought them I sat and sneered defiantly at them for a half hour, then I got up and left.

I thought that I would be conspicuous because I was in the city in uniform, and I guess I was. I walked by one woman with a small child, and after I passed them the child started to cry. I heard his mother turn to her companion and say, "Now that he's seen the elephant he doesn't want to go home until the rest of the parade goes by."

Wandering around with nothing to do was rather stupid, so I stepped into the lobby of the local hotel, figuring I might bump into somebody before long. I settled myself comfortably in a large armchair and gazed haughtily about me, expecting to be the target of all eyes. But there were soldiers everywhere—to the right of me, to the left of me, behind me and in front of me. Disgusted, I got up and walked around the ornate lobby. In a few seconds I discovered that a group of us had formed into a squad and we were doing some close order drill. The manager, nervous about the shabby carpet, hurried over, gave the command "About Face," and we marched out into the street.

I was lonesome in town and I hurried back to Camp. My buddy wasn't with me that night, and I wasn't having a very good time. Earlier in the week we were supposed to go on another hike. These little educational tours are pretty popular—with the officers, and when we go on them we carry everything we ever got with us. If we're really good fellows we can leave the Na-



*For the rest of the week, when I had nothing to do, I talked
to him as he peeled potatoes.*

tional Debt in Washington. My buddy started on one in the morning with us and he seemed a little gay. The lieutenant walked over to him and asked him, "Where's your canteen?"

"Oh," he said, "I don't have to carry that. I've got water on the knee and I can always fall back on that."

For the rest of that week, when I had nothing to do, I went up and talked to him as he peeled potatoes.

The next morning, after my night in town, we were to have an inspection as we did on every Saturday. The fellow who slept in the bunk next to me had had a big night, and in the morning he had a head to match. We both went downstairs to take a shower, and he began to feel better under the soothing streams of water. He looked a little odd to me, however, and I finally blurted out, unable to contain myself any longer, "Have you caught something alive, or are your freckles in the habit of moving?"

After a careful inspection we both knew my worst fears were realized. "I had a lousy time," he admitted, "and I guess I brought some of it home with me."

We isolated him from the rest of us as quickly as we could, making sure we wouldn't catch anything. But a little later I noticed him sneaking furtively toward the fire escape.

"Hey," I shouted at him. "Where do you think you're going?"

He looked sheepishly over his shoulder and explained: "I'm going to put my clothes out here on the fire escape, and when these little — catch cold and start coughing I can hear them and I'll murder them."

I let him go.



"Have you caught something alive, or are your freckles in the habit of moving?"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I Go Home

IT TOOK A LONG TIME, BUT I FINALLY GOT A PASS TO go home. In the Army, that's just about the same as getting a reprieve, and I was quite happy over it. For weeks before I was to leave I hewed closely to the straight and narrow path. This was easier than it had been in a long time, because I was straighter and narrower than before. The minute I started marching in the Army my flesh began a strip tease revealing more of the real me, and it was still going strong. I was getting so thin, after almost three months, that I could put my pants under the mattress to press them and stay in them while the job was being done.

As soon as I had my pass promised to me I wrote a letter to my mother. I told her not to expect me, that I probably wouldn't be there, I couldn't see how I would get home, and not to figure on my coming. Then, after taking all these precautions, I said I would be home for three days—sometime!

Then I started to bow down to people in an attempt to borrow the money to make the trip home. The only person with any was the Barracks Banker, and he was so tight he had the first dollar he ever made and two fingers off the man that paid it to him. He gave me the money, and I asked him how much interest he wanted. He told me he didn't want very much. Just 25 per cent, all my food for a week and two pints of blood. So I borrowed an extra five dollars from him to get a transfusion, and I was all set to go.

It felt good to buy a train ticket, only standing in



All around me I could see civilians...

such a public place made me feel conspicuous. I felt like a fugitive from a parade, but when I got on the train I began to feel more like myself, and I wished I was somebody else.

All around me I could see civilians, and here I had been thinking they were just a fad that wouldn't last. But, there they were, and one actually had the courage to sit down beside me and start a conversation.

"Are you in the Army?" he asked intelligently.

"Yes, I think so," I said, doing my best to make him feel at ease, like his brain.

He seemed to think I must know a lot of things about the war in Europe, but I told him that my grapevine wasn't bringing me any news, just wine. But he persisted, and he asked me if we would get in it.

"Not a chance," I said emphatically.

"Well," he said, "just supposing we do? Will we lose it?"

"Over my dead body," I replied with determination.

"That," he said, looking me over carefully, "is probably the way it will be."

I slept the rest of the trip.

My mother met me at the station. At first she didn't recognize me because I had become my former sylph. "Oh," she said. "What happened to you? And isn't it wonderful?"

I held out my hands for her to see the new calluses. She glanced at them carelessly and said, "You can wash them when you get home."

While she made a phone call I stood directly outside the booth where I couldn't help but overhear her conversation. She was talking to my uncle. "You can bring

the children over," she said. "He looks all right for them to see him."

A red-capped porter walked up to me as I stood there. "Carry your bags, sir?" he asked. I looked around me, because I knew I came alone. Then I noticed he was looking at my knees, and I saw that the press had come out of my pants on the train ride. My mother interrupted us before I had a chance to explain.

Some of my relatives were at the house to see me when we arrived. My little cousins were quite disappointed in me. I used to be their favorite playmate before, but those days were gone forever. I couldn't lie down on the floor and be a ski-jump for them any more. Now, when I curled up to play, I looked like a coil of rope.

For a surprise my mother had all the various types of food that I particularly liked. I managed to do away with everything but the coffee. Either Army coffee had gotten good or I had gotten used to it, because what my mother had tasted like a flat glass of watercolor paints. Roast beef, too, was somehow different. There was a time when I used to like it rare with the pink flesh blushing up at me, but when I bit into it at home I expected it to raise up from the plate and complain.

I went down to the old corner to see the fellows I left behind me. They were at the same place and they hadn't changed a bit, or so it seemed when the wind blew in my direction. It was just as if I had never left them.

I walked over in their direction. One of them, seeing my uniform, said, "Cheez it. It's the law!" They then faded from sight. It took half an hour's coaxing to get

them back. One of them said, "You can't pin nothin' on me." He'd been saying that ever since he learned to talk. That's why he was the first of the bunch to start wearing long pants.

They all stood around and marveled at my new appearance.

"Boy," one of them said. "Just before you left we were expecting you to grow a trunk and start living on hay and peanuts, you were so big."

"Yeah," another one piped up. "You look so good I'm willing to bet you could get a date." Then he added, "With a girl."

So he fixed me up. "This is a nice girl," he assured me. "The kind of girl you take home to your mother."

And he was right. I took her home to my mother and I left her there while I tried to get a date with somebody else.

My uncle was curious about the Army, too. He thought I must know a lot of military secrets, but I had to disappoint him.

"That's funny," he answered me. "I figured you talked so much and said so little that the Army would tell you anything, feeling it would be safe because nobody would listen to you."

But all good things must come to an end, and I had to go back. My mother went to the station with me.

"Be a good soldier," she said. "And keep your chin up. It should be easier now, since you've only got one left."



*"This is a nice girl....The kind of girl you take home
to your mother."*

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Honeymoon

Is All Over

ON DECEMBER 7, 1941, I HAD GUARD DUTY AS AN assignment. It was my job to walk along by the intake dam and see that the water supply for the Fort was not tampered with. I was to be there for twenty-four hours, but I didn't mind particularly. I had a little shack to sleep in and a fire to keep me warm. I started the fire myself by rubbing two matches together.

In late afternoon, as night approached, the Officer of the Guard came out to see me. After I had stopped and recognized him, I noticed he was rather tense.

"Have you heard the news?" he asked.

"What news, sir?" I asked. The only thing I'd heard had been an owl, and he left. Apparently he didn't give a hoot for me.

"The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor," he said. Then, admonishing me to be doubly careful, he turned on his heel, climbed into the guard truck and rode away, leaving me alone.

I continued walking my post, though not so casually as before, and as I walked I thought of the Japanese. In the Land of the Rising Sun the sons had risen a little early. I didn't know very much about them, except what I had read in the papers. However, I remembered that it was Admiral Perry who had "Opened the Door" in Japan. I wish now he was around to see just what he'd let out.



"The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor," he said.

Gradually, queer little facts about the queer little Japs kept flitting through my mind. They all get together and take a bath in the same tub just to have some good clean fun. They must like hot water, I guess, and they've certainly stepped into some now. From what I'd seen of them they looked as if they had been bashful as kids and grew up under a coffee table. When they talk they sound like a roomful of leaky radiators.

In the middle of my thinking I looked at some trees up ahead of me. The sun had gone down and I wasn't sure they'd been there earlier in the afternoon. The Japs were beginning to give me a new slant on things already.

Before I quit my post that night I challenged eleven fir trees and one white dog. I challenged one of the trees so loudly that the echo came back and I identified myself.

When the time came to be relieved that night I sat in the shack with the two other fellows on guard with me and had a long talk with them. "The Japs bombed Pearl Harbor," I said.

"So careless of them," the first said.

"Yeah," I agreed. "Kind of changes things, doesn't it?"

"Everything but my mind," the second answered. "I hate war."

"Sure does," the first one said. Then he was quiet for a minute. "Say," he finally asked. "If we're going to fight these guys it would be nice to know what they're like. Just how do you tell a Jap from a Chinaman?"

"You just wait until one or the other steps from behind you," I explained, "and if you pull a knife out of your back he ain't a Chinaman."

"So that's the way it is," he mumbled as we heard the guard truck with our relief approaching.

"Yeah," I said, "that's the way it is."

"Well," the second one said as we got our gear together, "what do we do about it?"

"I don't know," I admitted, "but if we ever do tangle with them it'll be the battle of the yellow men. I'm scared."

We stepped outside and crawled into the back of the truck and rode away from the intake dam. None of us spoke for some time as the truck pulled away from the flickering fire and headed back to the Fort. We were thinking. I had a picture of myself in my mind with so many medals on my chest I'd look like a pawnshop window.

"You know," one of the soldiers interrupted my thoughts, "that was an electrifying thing they did, wasn't it?"

"Yeah," I said, "but they're due for an international short circuit. We've got work to do now."

"That's right. We have. You know," he mused, "I think I'll do my bit right away. Tomorrow morning I'm going to get up for reveille by myself. The first sergeant won't have to throw me out of bed. It's the least I can do."

"Me too," I agreed as we rode into the Fort gates. "I think I'll practice throwing hand grenades tomorrow. I've got some of those cookies left that my mother sent me."

As we got out of the truck the bugle was blowing Lights Out. The last notes died away as we trudged up the barracks steps.

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